

THE INFLUENCES EXERTED ON HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS IN THE CHOICE  
OF A COLLEGE AND MAJOR FIELD AS PERCEIVED BY A GROUP OF  
COLLEGE FRESHMEN--WITH SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE ROLE  
OF THE HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR

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A Field Report  
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The School of Graduate Studies  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Science in Education

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by  
Margaret Elizabeth Maloney

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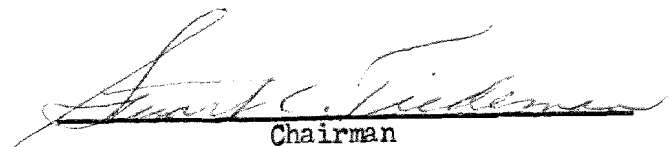
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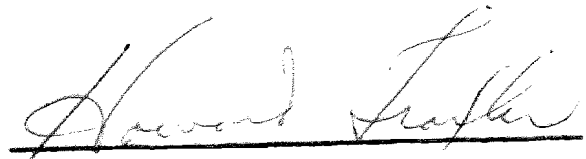
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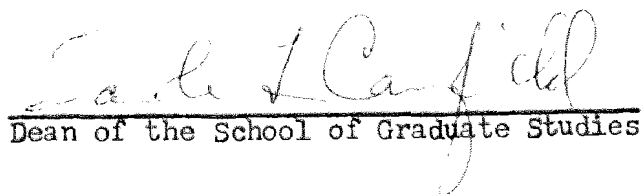
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	1
Importance of the Study . . . . .	2
Procedure . . . . .	3
Limitations of the Study . . . . .	4
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE . . . . .	6
III. PRESENTATION OF DATA . . . . .	19
IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	32
Summary . . . . .	32
Conclusions . . . . .	32
Recommendations . . . . .	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	38
APPENDIX . . . . .	42
APPENDIX A. Cover Letter Distributed With Questionnaire . . . . .	43
APPENDIX B. Questionnaire Used in the Study . . . . .	44

# LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Breakdown of Sample into Colleges of the University. . . . .	19
II. Persons Influential in the Choice of Drake University . . .	21
III. Factors that Attracted the Sample Group to Drake University.	23
IV. Persons Influential with Those Students Who Reported They Received Information that Was Not Adequate or Accurate About Drake University or Were Uncertain About the Information They Received . . . . .	24
V. Persons Influential with Those Students Who Reported They Had Made an Unwise Decision to Attend Drake University or Were Uncertain About Their Decision. . . . .	25
VI. Reasons Given by Those Students Who Were Not Returning to Drake or Who Were Undecided About the Following Year . . .	27
VII. Persons Indicated as Being Influential in Choosing a Major Field. . . . .	29
VIII. Reasons Given by Students Not Planning to Continue in the Present Course of Study or Undecided . . . . .	31

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The decisions made by students in their late high school years regarding college attendance are among the first major decisions that will be required of them in determining the roles they will assume as adults. These decisions are never made in a vacuum. The students are influenced by others. The objective of this study was to attempt to determine who these influential persons were and how much value was placed on this influence by a group of students after completion of one year of college.

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The objectives of this study were to determine:

1. Who were the persons influencing the college decisions of a selected group of Drake University freshmen?
2. Whether the information received by these students was considered by them to be accurate and adequate.
3. Whether after a year of college, these students thought that their decisions involving choice of college and choice of major were wise ones.
4. If these students did not feel that their decisions had been wisely made, whether they were blaming themselves, the influential persons, or poor information.

This research has paid special attention to the role of the high school counselor and other secondary school personnel in these decisions. Criticism has been leveled against secondary school personnel for spending too much time with the "minority" of students who are college-bound. These students are no longer a minority. It has been projected that 60 per cent of young Americans, aged eighteen to twenty-one will be attending institutions of higher learning by 1981.<sup>1</sup> Between 1951 and 1964 the number of students pursuing goals of higher education doubled.<sup>2</sup> It would seem obvious, then, that high school counselors and others playing an influential role during the secondary school years have a serious obligation to these college-bound students.

The responses of the sample of Drake University students were analyzed and some recommendations will be made that hopefully will benefit secondary school personnel, especially counselors, in their dealings with college-bound youngsters.

## II. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Douvan and Kaye have stated that, "The dropout and exchange rates in American colleges suggest that something goes seriously awry in the choice process."<sup>3</sup> It would appear that a widespread condition exists

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin L. Herr and Stanley H. Cramer, Guidance of the College Bound (New York: Apleton Century-Crofts, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Douvan and Carol Kaye, The American College, ed. Nevitt Sanford (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962), p. 223.

in which choices are based on inappropriate or transitory needs.<sup>1</sup>

Herr and Cramer stated that 50 to 60 per cent of those who enter college fail to complete their course of study at the institution which they originally entered and that only one-half of today's high school students who have college ability actually enter an institution of higher learning.<sup>2</sup>

These two sources as well as others emphasize the need for more wise counseling of the college-bound student. Hopefully, the results of this study will point up areas in which better information and better counsel are needed.

### III. PROCEDURE

The method of research involved the use of a check list type of questionnaire which was distributed to a random sample of 308 fulltime freshmen students enrolled at Drake University during the spring semester of 1970. The questionnaires were distributed during the last month of the semester and returned by mail to the researcher.

The sample was chosen from a list of Drake students provided by the Registrar of the University.

The questionnaire was formulated by the researcher after a large amount of library research and consultation with the faculty advisor for the project. Before distribution of the questionnaire to the sample

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 4.

group the researcher tested it on a group of forty freshmen chemistry students at Drake University. The objective of this testing was to determine if any parts of the questionnaire were unclear or ambiguous to the students. After the questionnaire was tested in this way, two minor changes were made. One of these was in the instructions and the other was the omission of one question which seemed redundant.

The steps followed in completing the project were:

1. Researching the literature for studies and writings relevant to the subject matter.
2. Formulating the questionnaire.
3. Testing the questionnaire for clarity and ambiguities on a group of forty Chemistry II students at Drake University.
4. Selecting a sample of 308 fulltime Drake University freshmen from a list furnished by the Registrar of the University.
5. Distributing the questionnaire.
6. Tabulating the results of the returned questionnaire.
7. Drawing of conclusions from the data.
8. Organizing and presenting the information gathered from the literature and the questionnaire.

#### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The factors considered by the researcher to be limiting include:

1. The size of the sample.
2. The percentage of return (66.2 per cent) of the questionnaire.
3. The fact that the study was made in only one institution, Drake



University. Since this institution is a private, non-denominational, four year university, a significant group of high school graduates who sought higher education in state universities, denominational colleges and universities, private colleges, junior colleges, or area vocational schools were omitted from this study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter the researcher will present a background for the study by pointing out some work done by others which is relevant to the problem of choices regarding college and major field of study.

Several factors seem relevant to the choices made by students in their late high school years at this point. These are:

1. The securing of valid and complete information.
2. The reliance by students on influential persons.
3. The consideration of matters of practicality.
4. The making of a mature and realistic decision.

The first factor to be considered here is the need for valid and complete information.

Herr and Cramer have listed four criteria that should be used in seeking information. They include:

1. A knowledge of all of the possible alternatives.
2. A knowledge of all the possible outcomes.
3. A knowledge of the probability of the various outcomes.
4. A knowledge of the desirability of the various outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

They also have said that, "When a student chooses a college, he also chooses the characteristics of that college; including . . . the sources of variety within the college or university."<sup>2</sup> These sources of variety include the curriculum, the students, the faculty, the pool

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

of alumni, and the physical characteristics of the college.<sup>1</sup> It would seem imperative, then, that the college-bound student obtain good information regarding each of these phases of college life within the institutions which he considers.

Walton and Mathis have stated that, "More systematic analysis of various colleges," would be beneficial.<sup>2</sup> They referred to benefitting the student, the counselor, and the parents. These writers have found that much of the information available about the various kinds of institutions of higher learning and admission to them is "inadequate, inaccurate and even inaccessible."<sup>3</sup>

Birnbaum has written:

Every year approximately one-half of the high school graduates in the country begin some form of post-secondary education. The decisions they make concerning the institutions they attend are often based on erroneous information, hearsay and the anxious but unfortunately uninformed comments of parents and friends.<sup>4</sup>

Birnbaum did a research project involving the dissemination of information by film-strip about community colleges to a group of high school juniors. His findings were that the information alone had little value in changing students' views about junior colleges, but that the film presentation in conjunction with an individual counseling session did

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-28.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley Walton and B. Claude Mathis, "Needed: Better Information About Colleges," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, LI (September, 1967), 78-92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Birnbaum, "Influencing College Attendance Plans," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLVI (April, 1968), 786.

lead more students to consider the possibility of the community colleges. This study would indicate that the mere publication of college information is not sufficient. The information should be accompanied by counsel. Thus, it is important that counselors, teachers, and parents have access to pertinent information and also have some skill in its use.

Lynch and Montaba have done research at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee which has suggested that students who have been accepted by a certain school seek pre-enrollment counseling in an inverse proportion to the amount of information they have received. In other words, the students sought pre-enrollment counseling only to the degree that needed information regarding college attendance, curriculum, requirements, and test scores was lacking.<sup>1</sup>

The research of Birnbaum differed from that of Lynch and Montaba in that Birnbaum's subjects for the most part were not even considering the alternative he presented. The subjects of Lynch and Montaba had already reached a decision as to which college to attend. Therefore, it is probably not significant that these two pieces of research seem to be contradictory.

Pierson made a study of 403 Michigan State University seniors who had changed majors. A check list type of questionnaire was used and the students were asked to check as many reasons for the change as were applicable. Forty-nine per cent gave as a reason that the course

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<sup>1</sup>T. H. Lynch and R. P. Montaba, "Illusion of Pre-Enrollment Counseling; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLVIII (September, 1969), 49-54.

content in their original major had been different than they had expected. Forty-three per cent said that at the time of entrance they had incomplete or incorrect vocational information. Sixty-eight per cent listed not having enough information about their present major at the time of entrance as a reason for changing.<sup>1</sup> Pierson stated that more complete information should be available to entering students regarding majors, course material, required courses, and vocational opportunities. However, he also admitted that no data were available regarding the effective use of the information that was made available to the students.

Goldman has presented the dilemma:

If counselors don't use the most complete and up to date appraisal and environmental information possible, they are neglecting to provide their clients with one of the important elements of a good plan or decision.<sup>2</sup>

The first problem Goldman perceived was that the presentation of factual information tends to take the attention of the student and the counselor away from the area of the student's inner life--his feelings and values. This is somewhat contrary to good counseling theory. The second problem seen by Goldman is that the use of appraisal information possibly puts the counselor in a judgmental position, which again is not conducive to a good counseling relationship. The problem, then, becomes how to maintain a good counseling situation while providing the information that is vital for the student to make decisions regarding his future.

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<sup>1</sup>Rowland R. Pierson, "Changes of Majors by University Students," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XV (January, 1962), 458-461.

<sup>2</sup>Leo Goldman, "Information and Counseling: A Dilemma," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLVI (September, 1967), 42-46.

The reliance by students on influential persons will be the second factor considered. The majority of resources have referred to the roles of the parents and of school counselors as persons influencing the college decisions.

Two pieces of research published in the early sixties have indicated that parental guidance was the strongest influence in college decisions. Roemmich and Schmidt found that 41 per cent of a group of 2,719 high school seniors in San Diego and San Diego County, California, perceived the most help in college selection.<sup>1</sup> Counselors were perceived by only 5 per cent of the same group as being the most helpful. Other persons mentioned and their percentages were; teacher, 4 per cent; friends, 11 per cent; no one, 37 per cent; and others, 2 per cent. The same study also asked these students who had been the most help in college planning. Again, parents were perceived as being the greatest help, with 48 per cent giving this response. The counselor scored somewhat higher in this aspect with 9 per cent of the sample. The students, to a large degree (30 per cent), once more felt that they were helped by no one in making college plans. The researchers suggested that this feeling might reflect that effective counseling had taken place in such a way that students were able to make choices and plans on their own.

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Roemmich and John L. Schmidt, "Student Perceptions of Assistance Provided by Counselors in College Planning," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLI (October, 1962), 157-158.

The other piece of research was done by Kerr, involving 1,350 high school seniors in thirty-three school systems in Iowa.<sup>1</sup> Again parental assistance was perceived as being more valued than that of school personnel in college decision making. Sixty-six per cent of the students saw parental assistance as being most valuable, while only 8 per cent valued counselor assistance as highly. This group of students visualized the role of the counselor first of all as an information-giver and, secondly, as a judge of ability. However, 88 per cent of them said their counselor had been of some help in making college decisions. The counselor was seen by 32 per cent of the group as the most accurate source of information. Fifty-one per cent of the students thought that parents should have the greatest responsibility for helping make college decisions.

Even though the students mentioned above felt that their parents were the persons most helpful and influential with them, Henjum and Rothney have pointed out that implications do exist for the counselors.<sup>2</sup> These researchers found that parents were very receptive to help from counselors in aiding their children to formulate educational and vocational goals. They said in part:

Parents as well as students should have more ready access to information about occupations in which the child has shown an

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<sup>1</sup>William D. Kerr, "Student Perceptions of Counselor Role in the College Decision," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLI (December, 1962), 337-342.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond J. Henjum and John W. M. Rothney, "Parental Action on Counselor's Suggestions," Vocational Guidance Quarterly, XVIII (September, 1969), 54-58.

interest and have more access to counselors who can direct them to sources of occupational information.<sup>1</sup>

Henjum and Rothney also found that those parents who had attended college themselves were more willing to help their children, while those who had not attended college relied more on school personnel.

A study by Groff and Peters indicated that a group of five hundred junior college students viewed the assistance received from their counselors as being very helpful.<sup>2</sup> This study dealt with helpfulness of various persons rather than direct influence.

In an article published five years later than the studies of Roemmich, Schmidt, and Kerr, Bentley and Salter foresaw the increasing role of the counselor in the formation of college plans.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of their research, they have written:

The counselor seems to have replaced the parents as the most fruitful source of information about the college and evidence seems to indicate that the counselor is rapidly overtaking the parent as the one who most influences his college decision.<sup>4</sup>

Johnson found in his research at the University of Maine that students ranked their high school teachers as being the most influential

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Robert W. Groff and David E. Peters, "Junior College Freshmen View Secondary Guidance Received in College Selection," Journal of Secondary Education, XLIV (October, 1969), 271-276.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph C. Bentley and Sterling Salter, "College Freshmen View Counselor Help in College Selection," Personnel and Guidance Journal, LVI (October, 1967), 178-183.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



in choosing a major field of study.<sup>1</sup> Thirty-nine per cent of his group responded that teachers had influenced them; while 38 per cent had found that their parents, counselors, principals, or friends had had the greatest influence. His feeling was that this also has implications for the counselor:

We cannot solely depend on a copy of a college handbook and a set of cumulative records. Instead we must attempt to be in contact with all of the significant individuals in the life of a student, as well as with the student himself.<sup>2</sup>

The literature has provided no extensive treatment of the peer group influence, but Herr and Cramer have indicated that in certain instances this factor is a stronger influence than the adult or academic cultures.<sup>3</sup>

Douvan and Kaye have expressed the theory that in most middle class homes parents influence the choices of their children either overtly or, in some instances, more subtly.<sup>4</sup> By subtly they refer to the values and attitudes with which the parents have raised their children. Also they frequently are able to set financial, geographic, and religious limits regarding the college choice of their offspring. Within these limits the students are free to make their own decisions.

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Johnson, "The Consultant: Role of the Counselor and the College-Bound Student," The School Counselor, XVII (November, 1969), 83-84.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., pp. 221-222.

Thus, these authors have indicated, the parents do in the long run wield the greatest degree of influence on the choice of a college.

The third factor to be considered involves the influence of matters of practicality on the college decision. Some of these factors are financial considerations, proximity of the institution to the students' homes, academic ability, and selectivity of the colleges. In many instances external criteria are influential in determining the school which a student will attend.

Stordahl's research has shown that in college selection students place more importance on intellectual concerns than on other factors.<sup>1</sup>

Hammond, however, found with the exception of young men with high scientific interests and aptitudes, that academic and intellectual criteria have little bearing on college selection.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of college is of greater concern to parents than to their children.

About 15 per cent of National Merit Finalists in 1959 gave proximity to home as a reason for their college choice. This same piece of research showed that 72 per cent of parents whose children planned to go to college thought their choice would be a school within the home state.<sup>3</sup>

Stordahl's research at Northern Michigan University showed that students living near the University were largely concerned with the

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<sup>1</sup>Kalmer E. Stordahl, "Student Perceptions of Influences of College Choice," Journal of Educational Research, LXIII (January, 1970), 209-212.

<sup>2</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

practical aspects of college attendance. Those whose homes were more distant were more concerned with social activities and less concerned with matters of practicality. Stordahl's sample showed the influence of others was relatively unimportant in choosing a college.<sup>1</sup>

Hammond said that the factors of public or private support, co-ed or like-sexed student body, size of the school, and physical facilities make little direct contribution to the college choice. He found scholarships and recruitment by colleges and alumni to be even less significant. However, in certain cases these influences were important enough to be the deciding factors.<sup>2</sup>

Douvan and Kaye suggest that students rarely choose between two schools solely on the basis of finances, but it is likely that only those schools are considered which meet the financial criteria of the student and his family.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding financial matters, today more financial aid is available and more high ability students are being identified from educationally and socially disadvantaged groups. It is becoming ever more important that those responsible for helping the college-bound be aware of these sources of aid and how to go about securing the necessary funds.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stordahl, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>4</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 229.

The fourth and final factor to be considered here is the actual making of a mature and realistic decision.

Herr and Cramer have listed two requirements of a good decision:

1. Adequate and relevant information must be obtained.
2. An effective strategy must be developed for organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the information in order to arrive at a choice.<sup>1</sup>

Douvan and Kaye said:

There are youngsters in whom conscious judgment and deliberative criteria clearly determine the choice; there are others whose choices take their form slightly, if at all from rational processes. In one the choice may depend on the influence of a friend or some other agent, . . . In another it may be a dramatic realization of some unconscious wish of the child or his parents.<sup>2</sup>

The same authors listed three psychological variables crucial for understanding the choice:

1. The criteria by which the schools are judged and their relevance to the issue.
2. The individuals or agencies that influence the choice.
3. The nature of the parents' involvement in the process.<sup>3</sup>

Herr and Cramer commented on the matter of parental involvement and the implications this involvement holds for the counselor and other school personnel. In part they said:

Parental decisions concerning the lives of their children may result in student maladjustments of different kinds: acting out behavior, underachievement, fatalism. Student behavior, viewed in this context seems to demand among other things that schools and guidance counselors take a significant role in redirecting community

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

attitudes which lead to the pressures upon students that currently exist.<sup>1</sup>

These authors also emphasized the integrated approach necessary on the part of the counselor. He must deal with the student as a whole human being, not simply as a college prospect. He must take into account personal, educational, and vocational aspects.<sup>2</sup> He must help the student to know himself and the nature of higher education well enough to facilitate his decisions.<sup>3</sup>

Hammond has described an approach to decision-making which he believes forces one to be rational.<sup>4</sup> This approach requires writing responses to basic questions such as: Why do I want to go to college? What benefits do I want to acquire by attending college? He then proposed the formation of a tabular device to weigh the merits of different institutions. The first step in the method involves delineating and defining the various factors pertaining to the choice, such as cost, location, size, strength of the major department, reputation, athletics, social opportunities, living quarters, and type of student body. Next a weight is applied to each listed factor depending on the importance of that factor to the individual. Each school under consideration is rated on each factor. The rating multiplied by the weight yields a

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<sup>1</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>John S. Hammond III, "Bringing Order Into the Selection of a College," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLIII (March, 1965), 654-660.

score. The scores of each factor are summed for each institution. This, then, yields a total score for each institution. The most appropriate choice for the particular student would be the institution with the highest total score. Hammond then suggested that, if the individual was disappointed with the result, he had probably assigned improper weight values to the factors most important to him or else he had received information which was not accurate about one or more of the schools.

There are probably nearly as many factors involved in making college plans as there are college-bound students. Herr and Cramer suggest that inappropriate original choice is a major factor in college withdrawals.<sup>1</sup> The importance of wise decision-making becomes ever more evident. The implications for parents, counselors, teachers, and others who work with and influence students during their high school years seem to focus on the need for complete and accurate information as well as the need for guidance toward mature and rational decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 4.

### CHAPTER III

#### PRESENTATION OF DATA

The plan of the researcher in this chapter will be to present the data that were obtained from the research.

The objective of this research project was to determine who the persons were who influenced the college plans of a group of college freshmen. A check list type of questionnaire was the primary research tool employed in this study.

Two hundred six of the 308 questionnaires were returned. Two were not usable. The results, then, are based on the remaining 204 questionnaires that were returned in usable form.

The breakdown of the students into the colleges within the University is shown on Table I. The sample was not designed to be proportioned in accordance with college enrollment within the University. The numbers ranged from eighty-seven in the College of Liberal Arts to one in the College of Journalism.

TABLE I

BREAKDOWN OF SAMPLE INTO COLLEGES OF THE UNIVERSITY

College	Number enrolled N=204	Per cent of sample
Liberal Arts	87	42.6
Education	35	17.2
Business Administration	34	16.7
Fine Arts	28	13.7
Pharmacy	18	8.8
Journalism	1	0.5
No college indicated	1	0.5

To the question, what person or persons do you feel were influential in your choice of Drake University?, the students were instructed to check as many responses as were applicable. They were told to double check the one they felt was most significant.

Parents were listed by 19.6 per cent of the students as the most influential in their choice of Drake and by 43.2 per cent as having had some influence. Only 8.3 per cent of the students thought their guidance counselor had been the most significant influence in this matter, while 23.5 per cent felt their counselor had had some influence in the choice. A group comprising 18.1 per cent of the sample felt that no one else had been most significant. The response to this question is summarized in Table II.

Seventy-four per cent of the student sample said that Drake had been their first choice of colleges to attend. Twenty-six per cent responded that Drake had not been their first choice.

The students were asked what factors attracted them to Drake. Again, they could check as many items as they wished, while designating which was the most important. Forty-eight per cent of the students were attracted to Drake by a particular academic program; while 45.1 per cent listed the reputation of high academic quality of the University as an attraction. Only one student was most significantly attracted to Drake by social opportunities, but twenty-one students listed this as a lesser attraction. The students were very evenly divided on the topic of distance from home. Sixty-two per cent of the sample found either distance from home or closeness to home to be an attraction. The



TABLE II

## PERSONS INFLUENTIAL IN THE CHOICE OF DRAKE UNIVERSITY

Person	Chosen as most significant person		Persons having some influence		Total	
	Number N=204	Per cent of sample	(More than one indicated) Number	(More than one indicated) Per cent of sample	(More than one indicated) Number	(More than one indicated) Per cent of sample
Parents	40	19.6	48	23.6	88	43.2
No one	37	18.1	4	2.0	41	20.1
Friends (yours)	25	12.3	29	14.2	54	26.5
Other	18	8.8	6	2.9	24	11.7
High School Counselor	17	8.3	31	15.2	48	23.5
Drake Recruiters	13	6.4	21	10.3	34	16.7
Teacher	12	5.9	6	2.9	18	8.8
Older brother(s) and/or sister(s)	9	4.4	8	3.9	17	8.3
Drake alumni	6	2.9	18	8.8	24	11.7
College night at your high school	4	2.0	11	5.4	15	7.4
Person(s) in the occupation you hope to enter	4	2.0	23	11.3	27	13.3
Coach	2	1.0	3	1.5	5	2.5
Did not list any as most significant	11	5.4	0	0	11	5.4

closeness of Drake to their homes was an attraction for 26.5 per cent of the students while 25.5 per cent found its distance from home to their liking. Twenty-four students listed other attractions. Among these were several students whose parents are employed by the University and are thus receiving free tuition. The response to one item on the questionnaire was somewhat interesting and contrary to what the research of the literature would lead one to expect. Of the sample 68.6 per cent listed size of the University as being an attractive factor. The complete results of this question are summarized in Table III.

In response to the question regarding reception of adequate and accurate information about the University before enrolling, 118 students (57.9 per cent) felt they had been given this information. Fifty-two (25.5 per cent) of the students did not feel they had been given adequate and accurate information, and thirty-four (16.6 per cent) were undecided. A total of eighty-six students thought they had received inadequate or inaccurate information or were uncertain about the information they had received. Of this group fifteen had listed their own friends as the most significant influence on their choice of Drake University. An equal number indicated that no one had influenced their decision. Nine of these subjects responded that their high school counselor had been their most significant influence and four attributed this influence to teachers. Table IV summarizes these data.

A majority of the sample, 144 students (70.6 per cent), thought their decision to attend Drake University was a wise one. Thirty-one (15.2 per cent) felt their decision had been unwise, and twenty-nine were uncertain.

TABLE III

## FACTORS THAT ATTRACTED THE SAMPLE GROUP TO DRAKE UNIVERSITY

Factor	Chosen as most significant attraction		Chosen as having some attraction (More than one indicated)		Total	
	Number N=204	Per cent of sample	Number	Per cent of sample	Number	Per cent of sample
A particular academic program	62	30.4	36	17.6	98	48.0
Size of the University	40	19.6	100	49.0	140	68.6
Reputation of high academic quality	29	14.2	63	30.9	92	45.1
Other	24	11.8	9	4.4	33	16.2
Closeness to home	8	3.9	46	22.6	54	26.5
Distance from home	6	2.9	46	22.6	52	25.5
Athletics	3	1.5	13	6.4	16	7.9
Friends attending Drake	3	1.5	26	12.7	29	14.2
Private school	3	1.5	44	21.6	47	23.1
Size of Des Moines community	2	1.0	29	14.2	31	15.2
Social opportunities	1	0.5	21	10.3	22	10.8
Did not list any as most significant	23	11.2	0	0	23	11.2

TABLE IV

PERSONS INFLUENTIAL WITH THOSE STUDENTS WHO REPORTED THEY RECEIVED  
INFORMATION THAT WAS NOT ADEQUATE OR ACCURATE ABOUT DRAKE  
UNIVERSITY OR WERE UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE INFORMATION  
THEY RECEIVED

Person checked as the most significant influence	Number N=86	Per cent of sample
Friends (yours)	15	17.4
No one	15	17.4
Parents	13	15.1
High School Counselor	9	10.4
Other	7	8.1
Drake recruiters	6	7.0
Drake alumni	4	4.7
Person(s) in the occupation you hope to enter	4	4.7
Teacher	4	4.7
Older brother(s) and/or sister(s)	3	3.5
College night at your high school	2	2.3
Coach	0	0
Friends (family)	0	0
Did not list any as most significant	4	4.7

Half of those students who felt their decision had been unwise or were uncertain blamed themselves for the decision. Eleven (18 per cent) blamed the persons who had been influential in their choice and seventeen (28.4 per cent) blamed a lack of information. A total of sixty persons indicated that they felt their decision had been unwise or that they were uncertain about their decision. Thirteen of these persons listed their parents as the most significant influence on their choice of Drake. Twelve felt that no one had influenced their decision. Eleven indicated that they were most strongly influenced by

their own friends. The high school counselor was the significant influence with six of this group, and teachers were with two. This breakdown is summarized in Table V.

TABLE V

PERSONS INFLUENTIAL WITH THOSE STUDENTS WHO REPORTED THEY  
HAD MADE AN UNWISE DECISION TO ATTEND DRAKE UNIVERSITY  
OR WERE UNCERTAIN ABOUT THEIR DECISION

Person checked as the most significant influence	Number N=60	Per cent of sample
Parents	13	21.7
No one	12	20.0
Friends (yours)	11	18.4
High School Counselor	6	10.0
Older brother(s) and/or sister(s)	4	6.7
Other	4	6.7
Drake alumni	3	5.0
Teacher	2	3.3
Drake recruiters	1	1.6
Friends (family)	1	1.6
Coach	0	0
College night at your high school	0	0
Person(s) in the occupation you hope to enter	0	0
Did not list any as most significant	3	5.0

Eighty per cent of the sample group did plan to return to Drake the following year. Nine per cent were undecided and 11 per cent were not planning to return. Eighty-seven per cent of those who were not planning to return to Drake or who were uncertain were planning to attend college somewhere else the following year. Thirteen per cent were undecided about their plans.

Table VI summarizes the reasons given by students who were not planning to return to Drake. The largest single reason listed was financial, which was checked by 35.9 per cent of those students. Twenty-three per cent of the sample gave reasons other than those listed on the questionnaire. Some of those other reasons were: the conservative and apathetic nature of the Drake student body, too much stress on social life, dislike of major department, conservative nature of the administration, desire to get a new start, desire to go to the school of his first choice, lack of initiative, and a feeling of Drake's not being worth its high tuition. Perhaps it should be pointed out by the researcher that this study was done in the late spring of 1970, during a time of student strikes and nation-wide campus unrest. It would be impossible to determine how great an effect these events had on the responses mentioned above.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the students' major field of study.

The students were asked what person or persons were influential in their choice of a major field? They were instructed to check as many as applied and to designate which factor was most significant. A group comprising 20.1 per cent of the students failed to designate any single factor as being most influential while 22.6 per cent said that no one had been most significant. Parents and school personnel both received less response than persons in the field of work the students hoped to enter (11.8 per cent) and earlier school experience (10.8 per cent). Parents were credited as being most influential by

TABLE VI

REASONS GIVEN BY THOSE STUDENTS WHO WERE NOT RETURNING TO DRAKE  
OR WHO WERE UNDECIDED ABOUT THE FOLLOWING YEAR

Reasons	Chosen as most significant reason		Chosen as reasons having some bearing		Total	
	Number N=39	Per cent of sample	(More than one indicated) Number	(More than one indicated) Per cent of sample	(More than one indicated) Number	(More than one indicated) Per cent of sample
Other	9	23.0	4	10.3	13	33.3
Financial reasons	8	20.5	6	15.4	14	35.9
I wish to major in a field in which Drake offers no major	4	10.3	3	7.7	7	18.0
Lack of social life	3	7.7	15	38.5	18	46.2
Poor academic quality of the University	3	7.7	5	12.8	8	20.5
Desire to be farther from home	3	7.7	4	10.3	7	18.0
Desire to be closer to home	2	5.1	4	10.3	6	11.1
Desire to be closer to friends	2	5.1	6	15.4	8	20.5
Marriage	1	2.6	1	2.6	2	5.2
Poor teaching	0	0	4	10.3	4	10.3
I only planned to attend Drake for one year	0	0	2	5.1	2	5.1
Did not list any as most significant	4	10.3	0	0	4	10.3

6.9 per cent, high school guidance counselors by 2.4 per cent, and teachers by 7.8 per cent of the sample group. Parents were mentioned by a total of 25.5 per cent of the subjects as having had some influence. The total for counselors was 10.7 per cent and for teachers 23.0 per cent. Earlier school experience was mentioned by a total of 28.9 per cent of the students. This also falls into the realm of the teacher, the counselor, or other school personnel. Work experience was cited by 22 per cent of the sample. This, coupled with the 34.4 per cent who mentioned persons in the occupation they hoped to enter, indicated another facet of influence apart from both the home and the school. It might also be noted that a smaller group (8.4 per cent) cited the influence of friends in choosing a major than in choosing which college to attend (26.5 per cent). The results of this question are summarized in Table VII.

The sample was questioned about whether or not the information they had received about their curriculum before enrolling was considered by them to be accurate and adequate. A group comprising 66.1 per cent of the students felt they had received good information while 17.4 per cent felt the information had been lacking in adequacy or accuracy and 10.3 per cent were undecided.

In answering whether they felt their choice of major had been wise, 147 students responded yes, fifteen said no, and thirty-five were undecided. Six students had not yet chosen a major and one had already made a change in his major.



TABLE VII

## PERSONS INDICATED AS BEING INFLUENTIAL IN CHOOSING A MAJOR FIELD

Person	Most significant influence		Others mentioned as having some influence (More than one indicated)		Total (More than one indicated)	
	Number N=204	Per cent of sample	Number	Per cent of sample	Number	Per cent of sample
No one	46	22.6	2	1.0	48	23.6
Person(s) in occupation you hope to enter	24	11.8	46	22.6	70	34.4
Earlier school experience	22	10.8	37	18.1	59	28.9
Teacher	16	7.8	31	15.2	47	23.0
Work experience	16	7.8	29	14.2	45	22.0
Parents	14	6.9	38	18.6	52	25.5
Other	11	5.4	2	1.0	13	6.4
High School Counselor	5	2.4	17	8.3	22	10.7
Family members	5	2.4	32	15.7	37	18.1
Friends	2	1.0	15	7.4	17	8.4
Career days at your high school	1	0.5	11	5.4	12	5.9
No major chosen	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.5
Coach	0	0	4	2.0	4	2.0
No one designated as most significant	41	20.1	0	0	41	20.1

Those students who thought their choice of major was unwise or were undecided about the choice were asked on whom they placed the blame for the mistake. Thirty-six per cent blamed themselves, 6 per cent blamed the persons who had influenced their decision, 20 per cent blamed a lack of information, and 30 per cent chose not to answer the question.

Seventy-four per cent of the group were planning to continue in their present course of study. Nearly 10 per cent (9.9 per cent) were not planning to continue in the same major and 13.2 per cent were undecided. Nearly 3 per cent (2.8 per cent) had not yet chosen a major.

The final question concerned reasons for changing courses of study. Thirty-two per cent of the forty-seven students planning or considering a change said they had found something of greater interest to them. Thirty-four per cent gave reasons other than those listed on the questionnaire. Some of the other reasons mentioned were: uncertainty about interests, desire for a field with more contact with people, feeling that present major is irrelevant to life, need to know self better, discovery of lack of aptitude for present major or greater aptitude for some other field, change of career objectives, desire for personal fulfillment not being found in present major, and disappointment with the curriculum. The results are summarized in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII

REASONS GIVEN BY STUDENTS NOT PLANNING TO CONTINUE IN PRESENT COURSE OR UNDECIDED

Reason	Most significant reason		Other reasons mentioned		Total	
	Number N=47	Per cent of sample	(More than one mentioned)  Number	Per cent of sample	(More than one mentioned)  Number	Per cent of sample
Other	16	34.0	0	0	16	34.0
Have found something more interesting	15	32.0	8	17.0	23	49.0
No major chosen	6	12.8	0	0	6	12.8
Present major is too hard	5	10.6	1	2.1	6	12.8
Have found something with more "future"	5	10.6	7	14.9	12	25.5
Present major is too easy	0	0	2	4.3	2	4.3
Did not have adequate information	0	0	5	10.6	5	10.6

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SUMMARY

The objectives of this research project were to determine who the persons were who were influential with a group of students as they chose their college and major field of study. The researcher's plan also included investigating whether or not the students felt they had received adequate and accurate information and whether they felt their decisions had been wise. The students who felt they had made unwise decisions also were asked who they blamed for the mistake--themselves, the influential persons, or the lack of good information.

The method included researching the literature; formulation, distribution, and tabulation of a check list type of questionnaire; and the drawing of conclusions. The sample group was a random selection of 308 fulltime freshmen students at Drake University during the spring semester of 1970.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter it is also the objective of the researcher to tie together some of what has been presented in the two foregoing chapters, the research of the literature and the research project performed using the group of Drake University freshmen. Lastly, it is planned to make several recommendations for the benefit of those persons involved in helping young people make college decisions.

The survey of the Drake group showed that there was no overwhelming majority reflecting the influence of any single group of persons on these choices.

The Drake group indicated that their parents had been the greatest single influence in the choice of a college. This would seem to agree with the statement by Douvan and Kaye, referred to earlier, that parents either overtly or subtly influence the decisions of their children and that the degree of their financial assistance often influences the type of college the student will choose.<sup>1</sup> The Drake sample also upheld the findings of Kerr that parental assistance was the most highly valued in college decision making.<sup>2</sup> These findings were also similar to those of Roemmich and Schmidt.<sup>3</sup> A greater number of students felt their parents had been influential in choosing a college than in choosing a major.

The second most frequent response regarding persons influencing the college choice of the Drake group was their own friends. The peer group came to light again with the consideration of the persons influencing those students who felt they had not received adequate or accurate information when making their college plans. The largest percentage of students who felt they had not received valid information cited their friends as having had the greatest influence on their decision. This

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<sup>1</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., pp. 221-222.

<sup>2</sup>Kerr, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>3</sup>Roemmich and Schmidt, op. cit., p. 157.

substantiates the writings of Herr and Cramer that students need to be counseled as individuals each with his own set of abilities and needs.<sup>1</sup>

Counselors were third in frequency of response regarding influence of college choice. In 1967 Groff and Peters foresaw an increasing role for the counselor in college planning.<sup>2</sup> More than twice as many students in the Drake group felt the influence of counselors on the decision of which college to attend than on decisions about a major field. Nearly three times as many were influenced by teachers in choice of major than in choice of college.

It appeared that the Drake group found more influence outside the home and school on choice of major than on choice of college. More than half of these students cited either work experience or persons in the occupation they hoped to enter as having some influence on the choice of a major.

A small majority of the student sample felt the information they received about choosing a college and a major field had been accurate and adequate. This indicates that the information provided was probably better than indicated in some of the literature. However, a quarter of the students who felt their choice of Drake was unwise and a fifth of those who felt they had not wisely chosen a major blamed these mistakes on lack of information. There still seems to be a great need for providing more and better information to large numbers of potential

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<sup>1</sup>Herr and Cramer, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Groff and Peters, op. cit., p. 271.

college students and their families.

Contrary to statements by Hammond<sup>1</sup> and in accordance with Stordahl's findings,<sup>2</sup> the Drake freshmen seemed to have been attracted to the school largely by academic opportunities. Nearly half the sample claimed to have been attracted either by the school's reputation of high academic quality or else by a particular academic program.

Holland's research showed that the size of the school had only a slight significance in college choice.<sup>3</sup> However, nearly half of the Drake sample group found the size of the school to be an attraction.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made here are largely for the high school counselor since that is the point of view held by the researcher and the stated emphasis of the project. However, it is felt by the researcher that in this area these recommendations also have important implications for other individuals including teachers, parents, college recruiters, and admissions personnel.

The recommendations are:

1. The counselor or counseling person should have access to information that is accurate and adequate about colleges and careers. Some research should be done by him to find out

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<sup>1</sup>Douvan and Kaye, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Stordahl, op. cit., p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>Douvan and Kaye, loc. cit.

which colleges are most frequently attended by graduates of his school. He should then become an authority on these colleges. He should visit the campuses, be familiar with academic programs, housing facilities, financial requirements and aid available, admission requirements, quality of various departments, nature of the student bodies, fraternities and sororities, religious affiliation or religious facilities available on or near the campus as well as any other aspects of the schools he feels will benefit his students. When students visit the schools themselves, the counselor should make them aware of the type of information they should be looking for.

2. The counselor must be skilled in the use of this information. He should not, however, be simply an information dispenser. He must learn to use his unique skill as a counselor in conjunction with the presentation of information. He must realize the extent of individual differences in his students. He should also be aware of the degree of peer group influence and help channel this into realistic plans and goals for each individual.
3. In light of what has been shown earlier about the degree of influence exerted by parents, teachers, and others, it seems imperative that the counselor share his information and insights with these persons and request the same sharing from them. It seems obvious that no one should be competing to



influence students. All the persons involved with students should work together as much as possible for the greatest good of the student.

4. The counselor would be wise to do follow-up research on students who have entered college to determine how helpful he had been and in what way he could have been of more help. Perhaps he could invite some of these college students to meet with the high school students who are considering the same college for an informal exchange of questions and ideas. This would also help the counselor to keep current his knowledge of the various colleges being attended by graduates of his school.

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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Bondurant, Iowa  
May 11, 1970

Dear Drake Student,

I am preparing a graduate project for my M. S. degree in Drake University's School of Graduate Studies. My study involves the influences exerted on high school students as they make plans for their futures.

Since you, as college freshmen, have experienced these influences quite recently, I am asking for your help. The way you can do this is by filling out the enclosed check list and returning it in the envelope I have provided.

I would like to thank you in advance for helping me in this way. I am sure this task will not take more than a few minutes of your time, which I know is very valuable at this busy time of the year. Your honesty and candor will be greatly appreciated as they are necessary for the successful completion of my study.

Thank you,

*Margaret E. Maloney*

Margaret E. Maloney

APPENDIX B

1. In what college are you now enrolled? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your present major? \_\_\_\_\_

For the following questions put a check mark (✓) in the blank before the appropriate response. You may check as many as are applicable. If more than one answer is appropriate, please use a double check (✓✓) before the one most significant response.

3. What person or persons do you feel were influential in your choice of attending Drake University? If there were several please use a double check (✓✓) to indicate which was the greatest influence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Coach
- \_\_\_\_\_ College night at your high school
- \_\_\_\_\_ Drake alumni
- \_\_\_\_\_ Drake recruiters
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends (yours)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends (of your family)
- \_\_\_\_\_ High school guidance counselor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Older brother(s) and/or sister(s)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Person(s) in the occupation you hope to enter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher (in what subject area?) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ No one

4. Was Drake your first choice of a college?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No



5. What were the things that attracted you to Drake? Please double check the most important one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Reputation of high academic quality

\_\_\_\_\_ A particular academic program

\_\_\_\_\_ Athletics

\_\_\_\_\_ Closeness to home

\_\_\_\_\_ Distance from home

\_\_\_\_\_ Social opportunities

\_\_\_\_\_ Size of the Des Moines community

\_\_\_\_\_ Size of the University

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends attending Drake

\_\_\_\_\_ Private school

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you think the information you had about Drake before enrolling was accurate and adequate?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided

7. After a year of college, do you think your choice of Drake was a wise one?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided

8. If you do not think your choice of Drake was wise, on whom would you place the blame?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yourself

\_\_\_\_\_ The person(s) mentioned above who influenced your decision

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of information

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you plan to return to Drake next year?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes (go to Question 12)

\_\_\_\_\_ No (answer Questions 10 and 11)

\_\_\_\_\_ Undecided (answer Questions 10 and 11)

10. If you do not plan to return to Drake next year or are undecided, what are your reasons? Double check the most important one.

\_\_\_\_\_ Financial reasons

\_\_\_\_\_ Military

\_\_\_\_\_ Marriage

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of social life

\_\_\_\_\_ Too much social life

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to major in a field in which Drake offers no major

\_\_\_\_\_ Poor academic quality of the University

\_\_\_\_\_ Poor teaching

\_\_\_\_\_ Desire to be closer to home

\_\_\_\_\_ Desire to be farther from home

\_\_\_\_\_ I only planned to attend Drake for one year

\_\_\_\_\_ Desire to be closer to friends

\_\_\_\_\_ Illness (my own)

\_\_\_\_\_ Illness (in my family)

\_\_\_\_\_ Academic failure

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

11. If you do not plan to return to Drake or are undecided, do you plan to attend college somewhere else next year?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided

12. What person or persons were influential in your choice of a major field? Please double check the one who was most significant.

\_\_\_\_\_ Coach

\_\_\_\_\_ Career days at your high school

\_\_\_\_\_ Earlier school experience

\_\_\_\_\_ Family members

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends

\_\_\_\_\_ High school guidance counselor

\_\_\_\_\_ Parents

\_\_\_\_\_ Person(s) in the field of work I hope to enter

\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher (in what field?) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Work experience

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific)

\_\_\_\_\_ No one

13. Were you given accurate and adequate information about the curriculum before you enrolled?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided

14. After a year of college do you think your choice of major was a wise one?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes (go to Question 16)

\_\_\_\_\_ No (answer Question 15)

\_\_\_\_\_ Undecided (answer Question 15 if possible, if not, go to 16)

15. If you do not feel your choice of a major was a wise one, on whom would you place the blame?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yourself

\_\_\_\_\_ The person(s) mentioned above who influenced your decision

\_\_\_\_\_ Lack of information

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you plan to continue in your present course of study?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes (you're finished! Thank you!)

\_\_\_\_\_ No (answer Question 17)

\_\_\_\_\_ Undecided (answer Question 17 if possible)

17. If you do not plan to continue in the same course of study or are undecided, what are the reasons? Please double check the main reason.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is too hard

\_\_\_\_\_ It is too easy

\_\_\_\_\_ I did not have adequate information before enrolling

\_\_\_\_\_ I have found something that interests me more

\_\_\_\_\_ I have found something that seems to have more "future"

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU!